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FOR

STRAINED-SILICON VOLTAGE CONTROLLED OSCILLATOR (VCO)

Inventors:
Gaurab Banerjee
Krishnamurthy Soumyanath

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Prepared by:
Jason K. Klindtworth, Reg No. 47,211
SCHWABE, WILLIAMSON & WYATT, PC
1211 S.W. Fifth Avenue, Suites 1600-1900
Portland, OR 97204
jklindtworth@schwabe.com

STRAINED-SILICON VOLTAGE CONTROLLED OSCILLATOR (VCO)

TECHNICAL FIELD

Embodiments of the present invention are generally directed to electronic
5 devices and, more particularly, to strained-silicon voltage controlled oscillator (VCO),
although the scope of the invention is not limited in this regard.

BACKGROUND

Voltage controlled oscillators (VCO's) have long been used as components
10 within phase locked loops (PLL's) and synthesizers, which in turn have had wide
applicability, particularly in the area of clock frequency generation. PLL's for example,
are commonly used in a feedback configuration to generate an output clock signal
having a desired output frequency that is derived from an input reference signal. More
specifically, PLL's/synthesizers are often used in microprocessors and in wireless
15 transmitters and receivers to achieve desired operating/output frequencies based upon
relatively low frequency input signals.

With the continued push towards miniaturization of electronic circuits and
devices coupled with the demand for increased operating speeds of those devices,
operating noise has become a significant and limiting factor in the design of such
20 circuits and devices. In particular, flicker noise has become a dominant source of noise
in silicon based metal oxide semiconductor field effect transistor (MOSFET) devices at
low frequencies. In fact, flicker noise often limits the achievable dynamic range for
baseband/low-frequency circuits and is a critical design constraint in radio frequency

(RF) circuits. In VCOs, device-level flicker noise gets up-converted to phase noise. This can result in adjacent channel interference in communication systems.

Flicker noise in MOSFETs is due primarily to the random trapping and detrapping of charge carriers near the Si-SiO₂ interface. This carrier

5 trapping/detrapping process acts to modulate the channel carrier density and causes fluctuations in the surface mobility of the charge carriers. Because of the slow time constants of the oxide traps and the surface states, the noise spectral density of flicker noise is inversely proportional to frequency, and therefore is commonly called 1/f noise.

Many VCOs typically use p-channel metal oxide semiconductors (PMOS
10 transistors) cross-coupled to n-channel metal oxide semiconductors (NMOS transistors), as well as an NMOS tail current source and an on-chip inductor and varactor. Although there can be a variety of factors contributing to the generation of phase noise in VCOs, flicker noise in the tail current source and cross-coupled MOS devices has been found to be the dominating contributor to noise. Additionally,
15 transceiver systems built using typical VCOs either receive interference from adjacent channels, or have a high residual bit error rate due to integrated phase noise outside the PLL/synthesizer loop-bandwidth.

Although a variety of noise suppression techniques have been attempted in the past, these approaches all require additional components or processing steps thus
20 increasing cost and design time.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

The present invention will be described by way of exemplary embodiments, but not limitations, illustrated in the accompanying drawings in which like references denote similar elements, and in which:

5 Figure 1 illustrates an exemplary strained-silicon PMOS device, in which carrier transport takes place below a heterojunction formed at a Si/SiGe (relaxed) interface;

 Figure 2 illustrates an equilibrium band-diagram for the surface of the strained-silicon PMOS device of Figure 1;

 Figure 3 illustrates a VCO in accordance with one embodiment of the invention;

10 Figure 4 is a graph illustrating simulated phase-noise within the VCO of Figure 3;

 Figure 5 illustrates an example phase-locked loop (PLL) including a VCO equipped with one or more strained-silicon PMOS devices in accordance with one embodiment of the invention; and

 Figure 6 illustrates a system in which the PLL circuit of Figure 5 is used.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF ILLUSTRATED EMBODIMENTS

In the following detailed description, numerous specific details are set forth in order to provide a thorough understanding of embodiments of the present invention. However, those skilled in the art will understand that such embodiments may be
5 practiced without these specific details. In other instances, well known methods, procedures, components, and circuits have not been described in detail.

Although various discrete operations will be described herein, the mere order of description should not be construed as to imply that these operations are necessarily performed in the order they are presented.

10 Reference throughout this specification to “one embodiment” or “an embodiment” means that a particular feature, structure, or characteristic described in connection with the embodiment is included in at least one embodiment of the invention. Thus, the appearances of the phrases “in one embodiment” or “in an embodiment” in various places throughout this specification are not necessarily all referring to the same
15 embodiment or invention. Furthermore, the particular features, structures, or characteristics may be combined in any suitable manner in one or more embodiments. Lastly, the terms “comprising”, “including”, “having”, and the like, as used in the present application, are intended to be synonymous.

In accordance with one embodiment of the invention, a voltage controlled
20 oscillator (VCO) containing at least one strained-silicon MOSFET device is described herein. More specifically, in accordance with one embodiment of the invention, a VCO containing strained-silicon PMOS devices is utilized in conjunction with a control bias to

yield increased buried channel conduction within the PMOS devices so as to reduce flicker noise and derivative phase noise within the VCO.

As used herein, strained-silicon refers to silicon that is "stretched out" due to the natural tendency of atoms inside compounds to align with one another, although the invention is not limited in this regard. According to one example embodiment, silicon
5 may be deposited on top of a substrate having atoms that are spaced farther apart than the silicon atoms, the atoms in silicon stretch to line up with the atoms beneath, effectively "straining" the silicon. In strained-silicon, electrons typically experience less resistance and can therefor flow faster than electrons in non-strained-silicon.

10 Unfortunately, however, due at least in part to the increase in electron mobility/conduction, the use of strained-silicon in MOSFET devices may result in increased flicker noise in devices due to a tendency for increased trapping and detrapping of charges in oxide traps near the oxide interface of the device.

In one embodiment of the invention, a negative voltage bias is applied to the
15 substrate/body (also referred to as a back gate) of a strained-silicon PMOS device to attract carrier transport (e.g., holes) away from the oxide interface (and corresponding traps) of the PMOS device resulting in decreased flicker noise in the PMOS transistors and decreased phase noise in VCOs employing such PMOS transistors. The bias may be fixed and/or steady or the bias may vary with time. In one embodiment, by applying
20 such a bias, a majority of the carrier transport is forced to occur in a buried silicon-germanium SiGe channel below the strained-silicon layer resulting in increased majority carrier flow and increased flicker noise. Such buried channel transport is typically undesirable in conventional devices since the further the charge carrier is away from

the oxide interface, the less control one typically has over the carrier flow. However, due at least in part to the positive feedback arrangement associated with oscillators, the effect of decreased gate control is minimal.

Figure 1 illustrates an example strained-silicon PMOS device 10, in which carrier
5 transport may take place below a heterojunction formed at a Si/SiGe (relaxed) interface. As shown in Figure 1, PMOS device 10 includes a base silicon substrate 15 (also referred to as the PMOS device body) having a variety of epitaxial layers disposed thereon. The term substrate, as used herein, refers to the physical object, which is the basic workpiece that is transformed by various process operations into a desired
10 microelectronic configuration. A substrate may be made of semiconducting, non-semiconducting, or combinations of semiconducting and non-semiconducting materials.

In Figure 1, the PMOS device 10 includes a buffer layer of graded SiGe 20 that is formed on a Si substrate 15, although the invention is not limited in this respect. In one embodiment, the SiGe layer 20 represents a $\text{Si}_{1-x}\text{Ge}_x$ buffer layer having a graded
15 Ge composition. A layer of relaxed SiGe 25 is formed on the graded SiGe layer 20. In one embodiment, a SiGe composition of $\text{Si}_{0.7}\text{Ge}_{0.3}$ is utilized for the SiGe layer 20. The source and drain regions 30a and 30b represent P-type wells formed within the Si substrate 15 prior to epitaxy. A strained-Si layer 35 is then formed on the relaxed SiGe layer 25 by e.g., the application of Si on the relaxed SiGe layer 25. Next, an oxide layer
20 40 is formed on the strained-silicon layer 35 resulting in traps within the oxide interface 37 as illustrated in the magnified view of Figure 1. In one embodiment, the oxide layer 40 may be composed of SiO_2 . Lastly, a poly-silicon gate 45 is formed on the oxide layer 40, and source, gate and drain terminals are constructed thereon as shown. In

one embodiment, a fourth terminal/back gate (not shown) is associated with the body/Si substrate 15 to facilitate application of a voltage bias to the body of PMOS device 10.

The source and drain terminals are coupled to source region 30a and drain region 30b, respectively. Source/drain terminals refer to the terminals within a FET (e.g., both N-channel and P-channel), between which conduction occurs under the influence of an electric field subsequent to the inversion of the semiconductor surface under the influence of the electric field resulting from a voltage applied to a gate terminal. In the event the source and drain terminals are fabricated such that they are geometrically symmetrical, the terms "source" and drain" may be used interchangeably.

In accordance with one embodiment of the invention, conduction between the source region 30a and the drain region 30b occurs as buried channel transport below the oxide interface 37. However, it should be noted that the buried channel transport, described herein with respect to various embodiments of the present invention, is agnostic to the process adopted to generate strain in a corresponding device (e.g., PMOS device 10) or to the sequence of epitaxial layers used to achieve the same. Thus, although the PMOS device of Figure 1 has been described with respect to a particular composition and structure, other such compositions and structures may nonetheless be practiced without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. For example, the silicon of PMOS device 10 may be strained through a variety of mechanisms including, but not limited to biaxial in-plane tensile strain using epitaxial SiGe, strain by tensile film, and strain by mechanical force, as e.g., described in the paper entitled "A 90 nm logic technology featuring 50 nm strained silicon channel transistors, 7 layers of Cu

interconnects, low k ILD, and $1\mu\text{m}^2$ SRAM cell", Thompson, S. et al. Electron Devices Meeting, 2002. IEDM '02. Digest. International, 8-11 Dec. 2002, Page(s): 61 -64.

Figure 2 illustrates an example equilibrium band-diagram for the surface of the strained-silicon PMOS device of Figure 1. As shown, a valence band potential well exists in the relaxed SiGe layer. This band-offset results in a buried potential-well in PMOS devices, within which the holes will flow. Because it is buried (e.g. away from the oxide interface), the holes will experience decreased random trapping and de-trapping, which translates to a lower flicker noise in the device.

Figure 3 illustrates an example VCO in accordance with one embodiment of the invention. VCO 100 includes three strained-silicon PMOS devices (10a, 10b, 10c), an inductive element 120, and a capacitive element 122 coupled together as shown, although the scope of the invention is not limited in this regard. In particular, PMOS device 10a and PMOS device 10b are depicted as being cross-coupled. That is, the gate region 118a of strained-silicon PMOS device 10a is coupled to the drain region 116b of strained-silicon PMOS device 10b, and the gate region 118b of strained-silicon PMOS device 10b is coupled to the drain region 116a of strained-silicon PMOS device 10a. Additionally, the source terminals 112a and 112b of the strained-silicon PMOS devices 10a and 10b are coupled together, while capacitive element 122 and inductive element 120 are coupled to each of the drain regions of the strained-silicon PMOS devices 10a and 10b. Furthermore, the source region 112c of strained-silicon PMOS device 10c is coupled to inductive element 120 as a tail-current source to the VCO.

In accordance with one embodiment of the invention, the bodies (114a-114c) of each of the illustrated strained-silicon PMOS devices (10a-10c, respectively) are

coupled to a bias voltage source (Bias-1) to facilitate increased buried channel transport within the strained-silicon devices (10a, 10b, 10c) and in turn, decreased flicker noise.

Similarly, the tail-current flowing through strained-silicon PMOS device 10c may be controlled through the application of a second bias voltage source (Bias-2) to the gate

5 region 118c of the strained-silicon PMOS device 10c. In one embodiment, either bias voltage source (e.g., bias-1 or bias-2) may be coupled to external decision

making/feedback circuitry (not shown) to provide dynamic voltage control of the

strained-silicon devices 10a-10c. For example, external decision making/feedback

circuitry may be used to determine a system figure of merit (such as adjacent channel

10 power) to determine whether the flicker (or phase) noise is approaching an

unacceptable level. In response, the decision making/feedback circuitry may cause the

bias-1 voltage to become more negative so as to attract more holes away from the

surface, thus reducing system noise.

Although in the illustrated embodiment, each of the PMOS devices of VCO 100

15 have been described as being strained-silicon PMOS devices, one or more of the

strained-silicon PMOS devices (10a, 10b, 10c) may nonetheless represent a

conventional PMOS device (e.g., not containing strained-silicon) without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.

Figure 4 is a graph illustrating simulated phase-noise within the VCO 100 of

20 Figure 3. Referring to Figure 4, it can be seen that an improvement in the phase noise of the VCO 100 occurs when lower flicker noise coefficients, representing the strained-

silicon devices 10a-10c described above are used. The use of different flicker noise

coefficients attempts to approximate the device level effects of buried channel hole transport.

Figure 5 illustrates an example phase-locked loop (PLL) 200 including a VCO 100 equipped with one or more strained-silicon PMOS devices in accordance with one embodiment of the invention. As shown, PLL 200 includes a phase-frequency detector (PFD) 202 for monitoring a phase difference between a reference signal 204 and a feedback clock signal 206 (in the form of a frequency divided output signal of a voltage-controlled oscillator (VCO) 100). The PFD 202 generates an UP control signal 210 and a DOWN control signal 212 to cause a charge pump 214 to respectively charge and discharge a loop filter 216. The loop control voltage 218 developed across the loop filter 216 determines the output frequency of the VCO 100. Furthermore, the UP and DOWN control signals 210, 212 driving the charge pump 214 set the proper loop filter control voltage 218 to maintain a minimal phase error between the input signals applied to the PFD 202. Additionally, the bias generator 220 generates two bias voltages, BIAS-1 and BIAS-2. In one embodiment, Bias-2 controls the tail-current through strained-silicon PMOS device 10c and the output of VCO 100. In one embodiment, Bias-1 is coupled to the bodies of strained-silicon PMOS devices 10a-10c and controls the amount of buried channel transport through the respective devices. In one embodiment, as bias-1 is made more negative, buried channel transport through strained-silicon PMOS devices 10a-10c is increased causing a corresponding decrease in phase noise in PLL 200.

Figure 6 illustrates one of many possible systems in which a PLL circuit incorporated with a VCO endowed with one or more strained-silicon PMOS devices in

accordance with one or more embodiments of the invention may be used. The VCO 100 (described with respect to Figure 3) is implemented in a PLL circuit 200 (described with respect to Figure 5) as part of an integrated circuit (IC) 300. In one embodiment, IC 300 is a microprocessor. However, in alternate embodiments, IC 300 may be an application specific IC (ASIC).

For the embodiment depicted in Figure 6, the system 302 also includes a main memory 308, a graphics processor 310, a mass storage device 312 and an input/output module 314 coupled to each other by way of a communication channel 316, as shown. Examples of the memory 308 include but are not limited static random access memory (SRAM) and dynamic random access memory (DRAM). Examples of the mass storage device 312 include but are not limited to a hard disk drive, a compact disk drive (CD), a digital versatile disk drive (DVD), and so forth. Examples of the input/output module 314 include but are not limited to a keyboard, cursor control devices, a display, a network interface, and so forth. Communication channel 316 may represent one or more wired and/or wireless communication channels including but not limited to a peripheral control interface (PCI) bus, an Industry Standard Architecture (ISA) bus, and so forth. In various embodiments, the system 302 may be a wireless mobile phone, a personal digital assistant, a pocket PC, a tablet PC, a notebook PC, a desktop computer, a set-top box, an entertainment unit, a DVD player, and a server.

Although specific embodiments have been illustrated and described herein, it will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art that any arrangement which is calculated to achieve the same purpose may be substituted for the specific embodiment shown. This application is intended to cover any adaptations or variations of the present

invention. Therefore, it is manifestly intended that this invention be limited only by the claims and the equivalents thereof.
